

Developmental Stage of Marriage- Marriage and Divorce at Different Stages

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Couples seeking counseling often believe that, given the 50% divorce rate, their conflicts, pain, and difficulty communicating or problem-solving, they are destined for divorce and may consider ending their marriage. Rita DeMaria, a family therapist and scholar, points to a different perspective on divorce statistics by framing them within her seven stages of marriage.

She identifies the stages as Passion, Realization, Rebellion, Cooperation, Reunion, Completion, and Explosion. The relationships most vulnerable to dissolution are in the Passion stage, the "falling in love" stage, and don't marry (about 10%). Couples in this stage are encouraged to savor the passion, develop a sense of us, learn their love language, build emotional intimacy, and expand their sexual vocabulary.

The stages do not represent finite periods with specific starting and stopping times. Instead, they tend to overlap, and earlier stages can be repeated.

In the early years of marriage, when some people recognize that they made a mistake, the realization stage tends to lead to divorce within the first year. Some couples can pull it together and practice new behaviors, such as learning to be empathetic listeners, practicing open, honest communication, splitting household chores equitably, maintaining friendships, and becoming a financial team.

The two stages most vulnerable to divorce are The Rebellion and The Cooperation stages. In the Rebellion stage, about 3-7 years into the marriage, couples learn to communicate, negotiate, and problem-solve. About 40% of couples who divorce will do so during this period.

The Rebellion Stage involves growing from conflict by learning to negotiate and compromise. Partners learn to turn power struggles into acceptance, go from fighting to problem-solving, set and pursue healthy personal goals, and forgive.

The Cooperation stage, which usually involves parenting tasks and responsibilities, challenges couples to learn how to work as a team to build a sense of "us" and a life together. Alternatively, the marriage erodes into parallel lives, with little focus on the couple's relationship. Within this time (about 10 years into the marriage), about 60% of the couples who will ever divorce do divorce. By 15 years, about 80% of the couples who will ever divorce will do so.

In the Reunion stage, couples work to improve their mutuality, get out of their ruts, and shift the focus back to the marriage. Although divorce is still possible, the probability of it is reduced.

The Completion stage involves "the golden age" of retirement when couples can focus on recreating and enjoying their life together. They may have adjustments, like reorganizing time, territory, and tasks, but they once again learn to play and be present in the moment. They can gain a sense of shared meaning and purpose. Scott Stanley, Ph.D., points out that people in this group who have been married 35 years or more and who have never been divorced have almost no chance of the marriage ending in divorce.

The Explosion stage is a period of relationship crisis. Relationship crises can happen at any time. Many marriages work through many relationship crises. Many marriages end in divorce during a relationship crisis. Couples that do divorce may not be able to rise to the occasion to deal with their challenges, whether infidelity, caring for aging parents, addiction, loss, and other tragedies, and many different manner of trauma, leaving their marriage open to greater vulnerability to divorce. (Source: Rita DeMaria, 2012). **Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2012 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and**

Many couples experiencing relationship crises may be dealing with challenging relationship stages and have at least one partner who believes they don't love their spouse anymore. If the friendship, commitment, and willingness to talk and be honest are there, the positive feelings of loving and "being in love" can be restored.

As couples navigate the stages of marriage and the challenges they may encounter, tools like **"The Honey Jar: A Couple Communication Exercise"** can serve as a beacon of hope and renewal. While understanding the complexities of marriage dynamics within its stages and times of vulnerability, couples can explore practical exercises like The Honey Jar to foster deeper connection and understanding. The Honey Jar offers a structured approach to enhancing communication skills and rekindling intimacy, which can help couples thrive in the various stages of their journey.

This is a digital product available immediately.



\$19.95